REFUTATION OF ALL
ANTI-WOMEN ALLEGATIONS
AGAINST BUDDHISM FROM
THE SUTTA

In this post we will refute and answer the major allegations put up on Buddha from the Sutta in the context of women rights

Since Suttas are the earliest teachings of the Buddha so I will ignore sources from Khandakas and most of the Jatakas which are later made texts and most probably not Buddhavacana

Some Buddhists consider these discourses (given in the post) as a later addition if they don't align to their mindset however that's unfair and wrong to do so , even if we can't predict which of the discourses were added later yet they can be answered if we look into the reason and story properly

We would advice Buddhists reading this even if for argument sake we consider them really misogynist and wrong still the amount of these discourses are hardly 8-10 amongst 20000+ discourses all over 4 Nikayas
On contrary, we find much of the material from early discourses which establish equality between males and females
So instead of crying over what we don't have why not cherish the things which we have

Sadhu 🪷 let's move on

CLAIM 1: AN 8:51 SAYS BUDDHA RELUCTANTLY ADMITTED WOMEN INTO THE ORDER, SUBORDINATED THEM AND EXPRESSED GRIEF FOR THE LONGEVITY OF DHAMMA

There is no reason given in Pali canon as to why Buddha initially denied the entry but possible conclusions could be made

- He was from a monastic community where monks themselves had negative attitudes against nuns (This is evident from vinaya commentaries which state Ananda was charged by monks in 1st council for requesting Buddha to admit women into the order) so the Buddha might have thought about it throughouly before taking a decision to avoid backlash from monks

- He just wanted to test Gotami's determination for managing the hardships of a monastic life hence denied 3 times initially (Buddha did the same to a warrior in SN 42:3)

We can safely say it was not due to Buddha considering women inferior because he would have still denied the admission of nuns no matter how much any one pleaded but this was not the case and Buddha eventually gives full ordination to Gotami which proves he wanted to establish a Bhikkhuni Sangha from the beginning

> "I shall not be fully extinguished until I have nun disciples who are competent, educated, assured"
>
> - Mahāparinibbanasutta DN 16.14

Now Buddha on ordaining Gotami places 8 chief rules which supposedly subordinates nuns to monks Rule 2 (Pāc 46), 3 (Pāc 59), 4 (Pāc 57) 6 (Pāc 63), 7 (Pāc 52) are in Pācittiya section of Patimokkha and the punishment awarded for them is confession, Rule 1 which is surely misogynistic from today's perspective says a nun must bow down to a monk irrespective of age however THIS RULE DOES NOT HAVE ANY PUNISHMENT FOR ITS BREACHING hence it can be taken as optional for nuns and it is upto them to follow it or not (similar case for rule 8), since both of these rules are not present in Patimokkha nuns in the theravada tradition are not bound to follow it

Interesting thing is Buddha himself says the minor training rules can be abolished by the Sangha after his death

> "If it wishes, after my passing the Sangha may abolish the lesser and minor training rules"
>
> – Mahāparinibbana DN 16.35

The Vinaya classifies all the pacittiya rules as lesser (khuddakam) which can be abolished legally hence all these 6 garudhamma rules you see are not fixed or doctrinal to Buddhism

Now why these rules were established in the beginning was due to the fact that nuns inexperienced in monastic life were supposed to learn under monks and to avoid the exploitation of nuns by monks

Buddha in the next sutta puts 8 rules upon monks which they have to follow for instructing nuns in which one says

"The monk must be liked by most of the nuns"

- Ovādasutta AN 8:51

In this way the nuns could chose by which monk they wanted to be instructed and all these rules of respect only apply to the monk which instructs them Yet, there are many Suttas which talk about the equality of monks and nuns too

"To me, the monks and nuns are like the good field. I teach them the Dhamma that's good, meaningful and well-phrased. And I reveal a spiritual practice that's entirely full and pure. Why is that? Because they live with me as their island, protection, shelter, and refuge"

- Khettūpamasutta SN 42:7

"Indeed, for the good of many the sage attained enlightenment for the monks and nuns who have reached and seen the fixed course"

- Vaṅgīsasutta SN 8:12

There are countless more examples from the discourses itself that establish the equality of monks and nuns in the eyes of Buddha

Why did Buddha say in Gotamīsutta that the True Dhamma would end within 500 years with the entry of women into the Sangha ? Buddha express his concerns in

"Furthermore, in a future time there will be mendicants who mix closely with nuns, trainee nuns, and novice nuns. In such conditions, it can be expected that they will lead the spiritual life dissatisfied, or commit one of the corrupt offenses, or disavow the training and return to a lesser life"

- Catutthaanāgatabhayasutta AN 5:80

With this concern Buddha was worried that the inter mixing of monks and nuns would weaken the spiritual life of monks and hence the Dhamma would end faster because of such weakened monastic community to solve this problem made Vinaya precepts which helped in segregation of monks and nuns

In the Bhikkhu Pātimokkha
Confession 30 prohibits monks to sit alone with nuns and
Confession 23 prohibits monks to instruct nuns in nunnery
Similar rules were made for nuns too so Buddha says ..

"When the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen maintain respect and reverence for the Teacher, the teaching, the Saṅgha, the training, and each other after the final quenching of the Realized One. This is the cause why the true teaching does last long after the final quenching of the Realized One"

- Kimilasutta AN 5:201

Since this is spoken inclusive with nuns it would mean the ordination of women would not shorten the life of true Dhamma
So the problem was not with women but the wrong interaction of monks with women

Even if we assume that Buddha was not enlightened in reality then it becomes even more easier to understand this, Buddha after all a human would have been a product of his surroundings and hence was influenced by it in his initials days but after teaching for 40 years and gaining experience about people his view about nuns and women in particular was changed too - from initial reluctance to encouraging nuns to become educated, competent and assured in his last Mahaparinibbana sutta this was how women proved themselves in the eyes of the blessed one, more importantly realising how societies change with time he even allowed sangha to abolish any problematic rule in future, the Buddha having realised his mistake and correcting his view makes him even more greater than other religious leaders
In Buddhism there are two components - Teaching and Training, the Teaching part is given in the Sutta which applies to lay followers and spiritual teaching to monastics, these are all fixed and can never change with time
While the Training rules are given in the Patimokkha which only apply to monastics to live disciplined inside the Sangha, the major offences like Parajika and Sanghadidesa are fixed while the minor offences like Pacittiya and Patidesaniya can be changed with time

CLAIM 2: AN 2:61 SAYS WOMEN INDULGE IN SEX AND CHILD BIRTH

This particular passage talks about the types of people What it actually says is that a woman who remains deeply attached to sexual activity and childbirth spends her life caught up in those desires and die. The idea is to help women become aware so they don't remain trapped by sensual attachment
It is particularly said for the females who are lustful have a bad rebirth, so it's not possible that Buddha considered all women as lustful otherwise all women entering hell would make Buddhist philosophy meaningless, similar can be said about child birth

"A lady lives at home with a heart full of the stain of stinginess in the morning, jealousy in the afternoon, and sexual desire in the evening. When ladies possess these three qualities, when their body breaks up, after death, they are mostly reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell"

- Tihidhammehisutta SN 37:4

This is why Buddha advices Laywoman Visākhā to refrain from sex and this is how men and women should live up a life to observe the eight factor Sabbath

"You shouldn't kill living creatures, or steal, or lie, or drink liquor. Be chaste refraining from sex, don't eat at night, the wrong time"

- Visākhāsutta AN 8:43

CLAIM 3: AN 4:80 SAYS WOMEN ARE JEALOUS, STINGY, IRRITABLE AND DUMB

Buddha said this in response to Ananda about those women who at the time did not attend council meetings or work for their own living and it lists the quality of these women rather than explaining the intrinsic nature about women The common mistake translators do is to write the 'women are xyz' rather than 'xyz trait in women' because the Pali of this sutta matches with the latter order, Michael Olds solves this issue in his translation

> "Wrathfulness Ānanda in women, enviousness Ānanda in women, selfishness Ānanda in women, poor wisdom Ānanda in women. These then, Ānanda, are the driving forces, these the result whereof women-folk neither sit in the assembly, nor undertake commerce, nor do inspiring deeds"
>
> – Kambojasutta AN 4:80 (Michael Olds Translation)

This critices the bad habits of the women who did not perform such deeds rather than criticising women community itself and we will see how – Buddha says women who are loving attain heaven (opposite to irritable)

> "They're faithful, conscientious, prudent, loving, and wise. Ladies with these qualities, they are reborn in heaven"
>
> – Akkhodhanasutta SN 37:15

Buddha says women who are free of jealousy (opposite to jealous) attain heaven

"They're faithful, conscientious, prudent, free of jealousy, and wise. Ladies with such qualities, they are reborn in heaven"

– Anissukīsutta SN 37:17

Buddha says women who are free of stinginess (opposite to stingy) attain heaven

"They're faithful, conscientious, prudent, free of stinginess, and wise. Ladies with such qualities, they are reborn in heaven"

– Amaccharīsutta AN 37:18

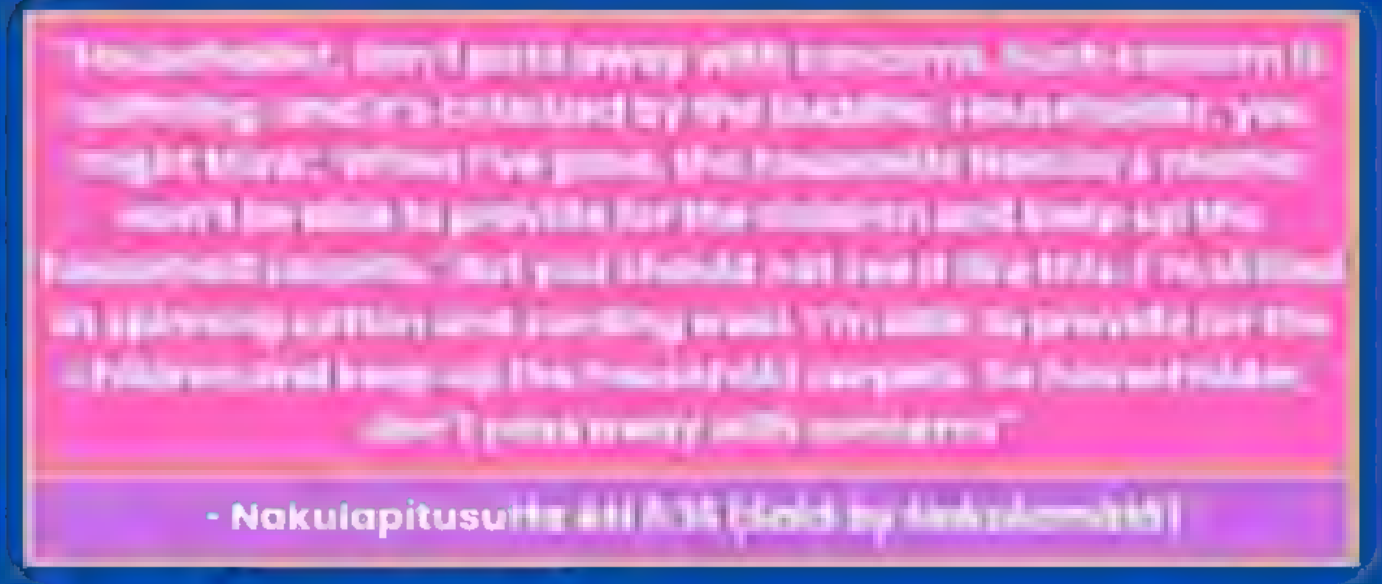
Buddha says women who are learned (opposite to dumb) attain heaven

"They're faithful, conscientious, prudent, learned, and wise. Ladies with such qualities, they are reborn in heaven"

– Bahusutasutta SN 37:21

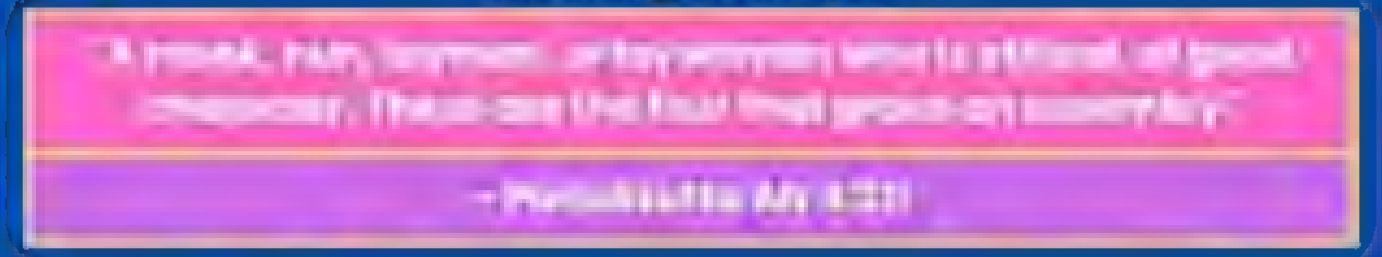
It proves AN 4:80 is NOT FOR ALL WOMEN but only for those who did not attend councils or earn their own living because if it was for all or generalized then it would not be possible for any female to reach heaven that would cause a contradiction in Buddhist philosophy

Regardless of the traits inherent or not still the point that Buddha wanted females to get rid of these bad qualities and develop love, kindness, wisdom will only prove that he wanted to encourage them Buddha praises Nakulamata who desired to earn her own living through employment if her husband would die this would contradict the generalized expression in AN 4.80



- Nakulapitusutta

Buddha says that women of good character beautify an assembly/council again this contrasts with the generalized meaning of AN 4.80



Conclusively, the Buddha wanted women to join assemblies and also earn their own living so he criticized the women at that time who didn't do this

CLAIM 4: AN 5:55 SAYS WOMEN TRAP MEN IN 8 WAYS AND ONE SHOULD NOT TALK WITH THEM

We need to keep in mind about the incident that happened in this discourse - it was about a mother and son ordained as monastics who indulged in intercourse with each other so in response to this Buddha gave this teaching to monks in this sutta Buddha says - 'When a woman stands sits lies down laughs speaks sings cries is injured, she occupies a man's mind' but interestingly in the discourses Buddha has said the same thing about man's attraction to women

So the problem here is not the female but the 'attraction' which binds both genders to lust

Additionally, it says that one should not chat with a female and they are a 'snare of mara' however this seems an exaggeration because there is lot of evidence in Sutta where monks like Maha Kassapa and Ananda teach and converse with women while Monks are allowed to talk with females but should not again view any woman in a sensual manner this is what the sutta says because it is important for ascetics to maintain celibacy and for that they have to minimize their interaction with females (that's how human nature works)

The attraction is not only for females but for all material wealth and possessions, Buddha even says that for monks these material possessions can be even more addictive than a female

"Even if you're stuck [on] a female and might not occupy your mind, but possessions, land and property would [still occupy] your mind"

- Mātugāmasutta SN 17:2

At the last Buddha says the people who refrain from sensual pleasures complete their spiritual journey with ease same applies to both monks and nuns (since men are more prone to lust so the statements like these are more compared to vice-versa)

"But those who fully understand sensual pleasures [not having] nothing from any quarter, they are those in the world who've crossed over, having reached the ending of craving."

- Mittapattasutta AN 5:55

Additionally don't misunderstand that this discourse promotes incest, infact it condemns it and a clear evidence from here too

"Mahā-kaccāna, I praise the right kind of sensual indulgence, I praise the wrong kind of sensual indulgence. I do not praise the wrong kind. What is the wrong kind of sensual indulgence? Here, a person has no recognition of the status of mother, aunt, or uncle and partners of elders. They avoid [sexual] intercourse with [their] mothers and aunts [and uncles] and partners of elders."

- Saṁyuttanikāya AN 5:3

CLAIM 5: AN 5:229-230 SAYS WOMEN ARE FILTHY, STINKY... LIKE BLACK SNAKES

Again, we need to ensure this was spoken to monks and not lay followers or women themselves, the reason is the same to inculcate very strict celibacy among monks so that they do not even think about females and their beauty, The buddha does not consider women as filthy or stinky but draws this type of an image in the monk's mind so that he leaves his addictions about human body and concentrate on spiritual life Buddha says the monks to consider their own body as filth too! So, will this make Buddha a man hater? No, it is well explained that such lines are ingrained in a monk's brain so that he lives a life full of celibacy

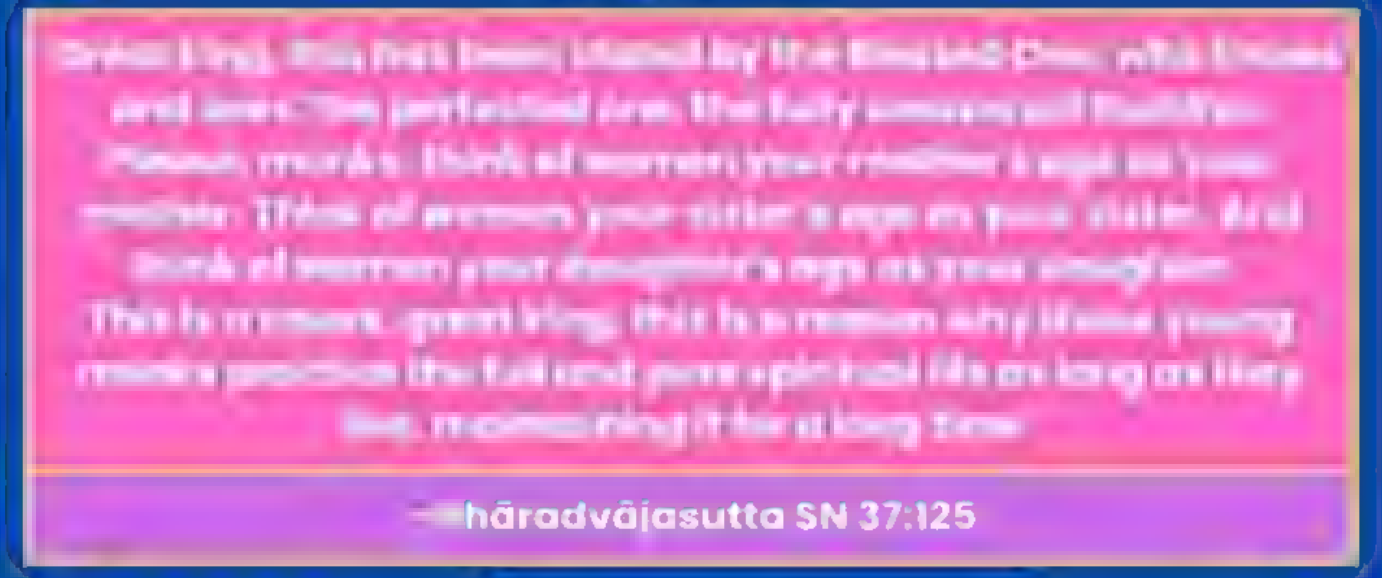
[illegible]
of many kinds of filth"

[illegible]

It is well understood that for monastics detachment from physical appearance is very important and for that they need to consider their body or any other's body like filth which would help them to avoid attraction towards any being Some traditions who do not adhere to strict celibate life will find this weird in Buddhism The imagery of a black snake is used to compare a woman to invoke an imaginary fear in the monk's mind (as snakes cause fear in humans) from the appearance of females

In this way they would not feel the need to interact with women Since this was spoken particularly to monks such statement would not be applied to lay followers, - Have you ever seen the Blessed one make such worse statements to any Lay disciple or Woman in Suttas? No because Buddha knows how to deal with different people

Buddha teaches monks to perceive all women as their mothers, sisters and daughters based on their age so that they don't even think lustfully about them and that's how they were successful in living celibate

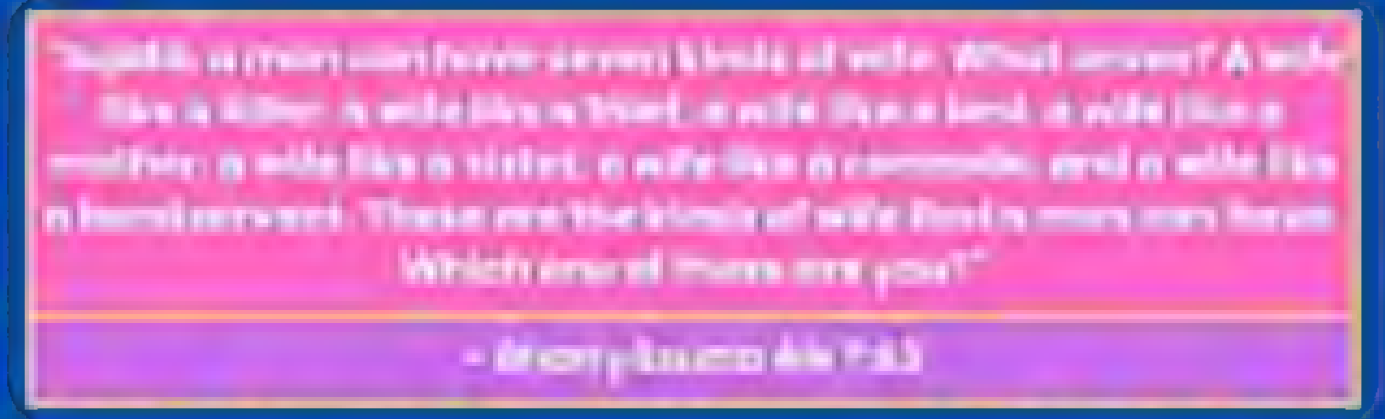


hāradvājasutta SN 37:125

There is a complete different tone when Buddha talks with women directly one can study then in AN 4:57, AN 6:16, AN 8:53, AN 4:197, DN 16.11, SN 55:39 etc this is why the sole reason of such statements was to ingrain a renounciant attitude in monks if he really thought of this about women he could have addressed them directly too but he didn't

CLAIM 6: AN 7:63 GLORIFIES SLAVE TYPE OF A WIFE

Buddha here explains about the 'kinds' of wives present in the world rather than the 'duties' of wives and even gives Sujata a choice rather than command



Out of the 7 only 4 of them reach heaven: mother-like, sister-like, friend-like and slave-like the most problematic here seems the slave type of wife because it says that a wife who does not get angry even when her husband threatens her with violence is a slave type of wife Pali Atthakatha of this sutta says 'वधदण्डतज्जिताति दण्डकं गहेत्वा वधेन तज्जिता, घातेस्सामि नन्ति वुत्ता' it refers to a specific case where the husband threatens to kill his wife (not beat) This is not a duty, but just a case if the wife does not get angry, obeys husband she attains heaven She gets this reward for her persistence tolerating even the worst type of husband, Note that this does not mean all wives should act such she is free to act according to her will

Buf what about the husband? He will surely go to hell because he threatened someone with violence which is against Dhamma

Since in Buddhism if any man or woman uses fist or stone or rod against another living beings then they will face negative karma ending up in hell , so the wife would attain heaven whole this type of a husband would attain hell so this is fair justice
Just imagine keeping yourself in a judge's place and to you a case comes regarding a cruel husband who threatens his wife with violence then in this situation what would you reward the husband and wife ? Remember that you can't reverse the atrocities done by the husband on his wife because that was not in your hands then Would you reward hell for a wife who tolerated the worst type of a husband? No right

"Take some woman or man who habitually hurts living creatures with a fist, stone, rod, or sword. Because of undertaking such deeds, after death they're reborn in a place of loss"

- Cūḷakammavibhaṅgasutta MN 135

This does not mean all wives should become slaves now because they do have the choice of being a mother-like or a sister-like or a friend like wife and still attain heaven, obviously these alternatives are much better and interesting to note here is that among these 4 type of wives according to Buddha the friend-like wife is most suitable

"A wife is the best friend"

- Vatthusutta SN 1:54

Laywoman Sujata herself accepted the slave-type of wife, the Buddha did not force or recommend her
As far as abusive relationships are concerned then Buddhism does not support them - if the husband is miserly and abusive then he is equated to a zombie it is clear Buddha does not support these type of abusive husbands

"When the husband is unethical, miserly and abusive, but the wife is ethical, bountiful, rid of stinginess, she's a goddess living with a zombie for a husband"

- Paṭhamasaṁvāsasutta AN 4:53

Similarly Buddha says that husband and wife should be equal in ethics faith generosity and wisdom also say nice things to each other living satisfied like this they delight in heaven This is the actual 'duties' of wife and husband which prioritize equality

"Householders, if wife and husband want to see each other in both this life and the next, they should be equals in faith, ethics, generosity, and wisdom. When both are faithful and bountiful, disciplined, living righteously, then wife and husband say nice things to each other. Their needs are amply satisfied, so they live at ease. Their enemies are downhearted, when both are equal in ethics. Having practiced the teaching here, both equal in precepts and observances, they delight in the heavenly realm, enjoying all the pleasures they desire"

- Vatthusutta SN 1:54

CLAIM 7: MN 115 SAYS WOMEN DON'T BECOME A SAMMASAMBUDDHA, CAKKAVATI KING, BRAHMA, SAKKA OR MARA

While it's true that women don't become a Buddha (In Early Buddhism) yet many people have this misconception that women don't attain enlightenment itself because attaining Nirvana is open for all and it's the same which a Buddha attains

> "One who has such a vehicle, whether a woman or a man has by means of this vehicle, drawn close to Nibbāna"
>
> - Accharāsutta SN 1:46

Women attain enlightenment the ultimate goal that is clear hence they don't need to be born as a Buddha to attain Nirvana
In Early Buddhism, Buddha only teaches both men and women the path to Arhatship and not Buddhahood this is why you will never see any man seeking for Buddhahood in Tipitaka
So if women attain the same enlightenment of a Buddha by Arhat hood then what's the problem?

> "A lady is able to realize the fruits of stream-entry, once-return, non-return, and perfection once she has gone forth"
>
> - Gotamīsutta AN 8:51

'Perfection' means becoming an Arhant the Buddha is called a 'Perfected One' because he too attained Arhatship
So it's clear that women attain Perfection

In Early Buddhism

Sammāsambuddha = Awakened one + Realised One

Arhant = Awakened One

So the awakening or enlightenment of a Buddha and Arhant are the same but the methods are different - a Buddha attains awakening by his own realisation when there is no Dhamma present in the world while an Arhant attains awakening by following a Buddha

Basically, when a Bodhisatta is born in his last life he always attains a male body because in Buddhist theology a Buddha and a Cakkavati king need to possess 32 marks on their body (see DN 30) which are only found in biological males so women don't be born as a Buddha, Therefore it's not a sign of spiritual inferiority but an effect of biological difference

Cakkavati king is a fictional character in Buddhism who controls the whole world it does not mean a ruler because no person in the world can control the whole world under his reign this is why no king in Tipitaka is called a 'Cakkavati King' and why women don't become one is the same reason stated earlier

Some people wrongly assume it prohibits women from ruling but the Sutta nowhere prohibits women from ruling a kingdom off course they can rule a state by being a queen itself and there are countless of such examples in the history of Buddhist countries

Brahma and Sakka(Indra) are male gods inherited from Vedic literature, when they are already male then it's not possible that a women can become one Māra is an evil character and it's good that women are not presented as a Satan in Buddhist literature